

Women's Safe Space Policy

Revised July 2008

PHILOSOPHY

A comprehensive review and restructure of the service in 1999, confirmed the importance of the centre's feminist philosophy.

Central to this feminist commitment is the notion that clients, community members, and staff have a right to feel safe in a feminist space. Women and women's needs must have priority at all times, and the needs or wishes of any individual woman must not impinge on the rights of other women.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the policy is to clarify the centre's position with regard to the definition of women's safe space, in particular with regard to having men in the centre, and thereby to ensure consistency of approach with regard to this issue.

POLICY

Definition:

The centre is designated *women's safe space*. This means that all women visiting for whatever reason, may feel safe to be themselves, and to feel comfortable, without having to share the space with men, or undergo male scrutiny. *Women's safe space* makes it more possible for women to talk to each other, to pick up and read any literature/brochures etc, without embarrassment, to relax and enjoy the welcoming environment.

RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff are responsible for informing women at the point of intake, booking or first enquiry, about our 'women-only safe space' policy.

All staff who see clients on a one-to-one basis are to inform the clients of our policy.

Staff who provide information to external agencies are responsible to inform those other agencies of our policy.

Whoever greets visitors has a responsibility to inform them of our policy as the need arises. There will be times when exceptions need to be made for good reasons. The central concept of women's safe space will be kept in mind, and every effort made to uphold the policy and to minimise discomfort to clients or visitors to the centre

Protocol

- 1.0 Women's safe space will be maintained by not allowing men to sit in the waiting room. A notice to this effect will be displayed outside the building, and other ways of promoting the concept of women-only safe space will be used as appropriate eg in newsletters, talks, and groups.
- 2.0 If women who have never been to the centre before make an enquiry about appointments for couples, eg couple counselling, they will be referred to other services who will see couples. There are legitimate circumstances that may be taken into consideration for new appointments, when a client herself may wish to have a male present at a medical consultation, but this would not be the norm, and would usually be a one-off with a specific goal/purpose in mind. Men (partners etc) will not be used as interpreters for clients.

If a client indicates to her Health Care Worker that she really wants her male partner/relative/or friend present for a future consultation, eg for him to receive information or advice, or on the other hand for him to provide information or support, then this may be arranged with the Health Care Worker and the Reception/Admin Worker. In this case, a planned booking will be made, and on the occasion of the consultation the client and her partner/relative/or friend will be greeted together, and they will *both* be shown to another waiting area, eg the staff room or counselling room.

- 4.0 During the consultation with a client and her male partner, if the doctor or nurse needs to perform a procedure such as a pap smear or vaginal swab, the male partner will be asked to wait outside.
- 5.0 In circumstances other than above, a commonsense approach will prevail; however the central concept of women's safe space will be kept in mind at all times. With regard to some particular instances:

5.1 *If men accompany women as 'walk-ins', despite the sign out the front....*
Any staff member welcoming the visitors must point out that it is women-only safe space, and that should the woman be staying to see someone, they can wait together in another waiting space, eg while the woman is waiting for the health worker, or the man may choose to wait in the car, or outside, or drive off to Warilla for a coffee and return in one hour etc.

5.2 *Older male children accompanying clients*
Obviously common sense must prevail here – it will depend to some degree on how 'mature' the boy looks rather than his actual age. Again, any staff member welcoming visitors must explain our policy and/or direct the two visitors to another waiting area.

5.3 *Laboratory/couriers*
Couriers are usually in a hurry, and in and out fairly quickly, and do not present a problem in the waiting area.

5.4 Tradesmen

Tradeswomen will be chosen wherever possible and practicable – otherwise, tradesmen will be engaged to come on Wednesday afternoons or before or after hours to minimise difficulties. In emergency situations, eg for telephone or computer problems, electricity or water problems exceptions will be made.

5.5 *Police or health/welfare professionals*

If police have to come to the centre eg to take a statement from a client, staff will always ask for female police officers if possible. The police officers will be directed immediately away from the waiting room. In the case of men who are health/welfare professionals, they will be met in reception and immediately taken to an appropriate room

5.6 *Special events such as public launches, training days for key agencies etc*

These events may be held with mixed participation if held in the group rooms, and access is advertised and made through the courtyard.

5.7 *Visitors to the centre such as mixed groups on study tour*

Where possible these visits will be arranged for Wednesday afternoons, or any evening, or during the lunch hour.

5.8 *Students*

Students on placement will only ever be women. Male students phoning or dropping in for information or learning about women's health centres, will be asked to book a time to talk with a staff member. They will not be permitted to browse in the waiting area.

6.0 Male partners/relatives/or friends of staff

Male partners/relatives/or friends of staff may not wait in the waiting area or enter the reception office. They may meet the staff member in the courtyard and be taken to a private, available space to talk.

The next review will be undertaken by 2010
